

*Administration of Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2022*

**Remarks on the Release of Brittney Y. Griner From Detention in Russia and an Exchange With Reporters**

*December 8, 2022*

*The President.* Well, good morning, folks. And it is a good morning.

Moments ago, standing together with her wife Cherelle in the Oval Office, I spoke with Brittney Griner. She's safe. She's on a plane. She's on her way home.

After months of being unjustly detained in Russia, held under intolerable circumstances, Brittney will soon be back in the arms of her loved ones, and she should have been there all along.

This is a day we've worked toward for a long time. We never stopped pushing for her release. It took painstaking and intense negotiations, and I want to thank all the hard-working public servants across my administration who worked tirelessly to secure her release.

I also want to thank the U.A.E. for helping us facilitate Brittney's return, because that's where she landed.

These past few months have been hell for Brittney and for Charlee [Cherelle; White House correction] and her entire family and all her teammates back home. People all across the country have learned about Brittney's story, advocated for her release, stood with her throughout this terrible ordeal. And I know that support meant a lot to her family.

I'm glad to be able to say that Brittney is in good spirits. She's relieved to finally be heading home. And the fact remains that she's lost months of her life, experienced a needless trauma, and she deserves space, privacy, and time with her loved ones to recover and heal from her time being wrongfully detained.

Brittney is an incomparable athlete, a two-time Olympic Gold Medalist for Team U.S.A. She endured mistreatment and a show—at a show trial in Russia with characteristic grit and incredible dignity. She represents the best America—the best about America—just across the board, everything about her.

She wrote to me back in July. She didn't ask for special treatment, even though we've been working on her release from the day one. She requested a simple quote: "Please don't forget about me and the other American detainees. Please do all you can to bring us home."

We never forgot about Brittney. And we've not forgotten about Paul Whelan, who has been unjustly detained in Russia for years. This was not a choice of which American to bring home. We brought home Trevor Reed when we had a chance earlier this year. Sadly, for totally illegitimate reasons, Russia is treating Paul's case differently than Brittney's. And while we have not yet succeeded in securing Paul's release, we are not giving up. We will never give up.

We remain in close touch with Paul's family, the Whelan family. And my thoughts and prayers are with them today. They have to have such mixed emotions today. And we'll keep negotiating in good faith for Paul's release. I guarantee that. I say that to the family: I guarantee you.

And I urge Russia to do the same to ensure that Paul's health and humane treatment are maintained until we can—are able to bring him home.

I don't want any American to sit wrongfully detained 1 extra day if we can bring that person home. My administration has now brought home dozens of Americans who were wrongfully detained or held hostage abroad, many of whom had been held since before I took office.

And today we also remember the other Americans that are being held hostage and wrongfully detained in Russia or anywhere else in the world. Reuniting these Americans with their loved ones remains a priority, a priority for my administration and every person in my administration involved in this. And we're going to continue to work to bring home every American who continues to endure such an injustice.

We also want to prevent any more American families from suffering this pain and separation. And I strongly urge—I strongly urge—all Americans to take precautions, including reviewing the State Department's travel advisories before they travel overseas, which now includes warnings about the risk of being wrongfully detained by a foreign government.

Make no mistake about it: This work is not easy. Negotiations are always difficult. There are never any guarantees. But it's my job as President of the United States to make the hard calls and protect American citizens everywhere in the world. Anywhere in the world. And I'm proud that today we have made one more family whole again.

So welcome home, Brittney.

And now I'd like to invite Cherelle to say a few words to you all. Of course, she's not excited at all about this. Cherelle, it's all yours, kiddo. Congratulations again.

*Cherelle T. Griner, wife of Ms. Griner.* Thank you. Thank you.

So, over the last 9 months, you all have been so privy to one of the darkest moments of my life. And so today I'm just standing here overwhelmed with emotions. But the most important emotion that I have right now is just sincere gratitude for President Biden and his entire administration.

He just mentioned this work is not easy, and it has not been. There's been so many hands involved, and so I'd like to take a moment to just specifically mention a few: Vice President Harris, Secretary Blinken, Jake Sullivan, Josh Geltzer from the National Security Council. Roger Carstens and Fletcher Schoen from the Hostage Envoy's Office. A special thank you to Governor Richardson and Mickey. The Mercury players, the WNBPA for your advocacy. And also, you guys may not know this, but my family has been tremendously supported by the Wasserman agency. B.G.'s agent, Lindsay Colas, has just been amazing for me and my family throughout this process.

So today my family is whole. But as you all are aware, there's so many other families who are not whole, and so B.G. is not here to say this, but I will gladly speak on her behalf and say that B.G. and I will remain committed to the work of getting every American home, including Paul, whose family is in our hearts today as we celebrate B.G. being home. We do understand that there are still people out here who are enduring what I endured the last 9 months of missing tremendously their loved ones.

So thank you, everybody, for your support. And today is just a happy day for me and my family. So I'm going to smile right now. Thank you.

*The President.* Thank you. Thank you all very much.

*Q.* Ms. Griner, what——

*Q.* Mr. President, what has Russia gotten in return, Mr. President? What has Russia gotten in return for this prisoner swap?

*Q.* Mr. President, what do you say to the Whelan family, who says this is a catastrophe for Paul?

*Brittney Griner's Return to the U.S.*

*Q.* Mr. President, when will Brittney be back in the U.S.? When will she land?

*Q.* What has Russia gotten in return, Mr. President, for this prisoner swap?

*The President.* In the next 24 hours.

*Q.* Thank you.

*Detention of U.S. Citizen Paul N. Whelan in Russia*

*Q.* What do you say to the Whelan family, who says this is a catastrophe for Paul, Mr. President?

*The President.* We're speaking to them.

*Q.* How soon will he be home?

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:38 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Paul N. Whelan, a U.S. citizen who was arrested and held on espionage charges by Russian security services in Moscow, Russia, on December 28, 2018; and Trevor Reed, a former U.S. marine released from Russian detention on April 27. Ms. Griner referred to former National Security Adviser Jacob J. Sullivan; Deputy Homeland Security Adviser Joshua A. Geltzer; Special Presidential Envoy for Hostage Affairs Roger D. Carstens; Gov. William B. Richardson of Arizona, in his capacity as founder of the Richardson Center for Global Engagement, a private foundation focused on conflict resolution and prisoner release; and Michael "Mickey" Bergman, vice president and executive director of the Richardson Center.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Brittney Y. Griner, release from detention in Russia; Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters, White House.

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